

The Crucible, Act I by Arthur Miller
Reading Warm-up A

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

To appreciate Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, it is helpful to understand the historical background of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which included Salem. In the seventeenth century, Massachusetts had a special kind of autocratic, dictatorial government, called a *theocracy*. In this government, there was no separation of church and state. Only church members in good standing could vote. The Puritan authorities demanded citizens' complete loyalty and also their homage. They met any party or faction that opposed or criticized them with vindictive, even ruthless, opposition.

In England, the Puritans had been victims of persecution. This sad, even somber, part of their history was an important reason for their decision to emigrate. They first traveled to Holland and then to America in search of religious freedom. Once in America, however, the Puritans' unwillingness to tolerate dissent presents us with a paradox, or apparent contradiction.

Consider the case of Anne Hutchinson, who was hounded out of Massachusetts in 1637 as a villainous threat to society. Hutchinson was a religious liberal. She founded a woman's group in Boston to discuss religious views and recent sermons by ministers. She criticized the Puritan clergy, saying they were guilty of hypocrisy. The clergy, Hutchinson said, emphasized narrowly legalistic concepts of morality but ignored the individual's ability to choose ethical behavior.

Hutchinson's opposition to the Puritan establishment soon led to the powerful opposition of John Winthrop, the most influential clergyman in Massachusetts. She was tried on the charge of "betraying the ministers" and then sentenced to banishment. With some of her followers, she then established a settlement in what is now Rhode Island.

1. Underline the word that gives a clue to the meaning of autocratic. Use a word meaning the opposite of *autocratic* in a sentence of your own.
2. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of homage. What is a synonym for *homage*?
3. Underline the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of faction. Use the word *faction* in an original sentence.
4. What is a synonym for vindictive? What is an antonym for *vindictive*?
5. Circle the words in this and the previous sentence that offer a clue to the meaning of somber. Write a sentence about something or someone that you feel is *somber*.
6. Underline the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of paradox. In your own words, restate the *paradox* identified in this and the preceding sentences.
7. What is a synonym for villainous? What is an antonym for the word *villainous*?
8. Underline the words in the next sentence that give a clue to the meaning of hypocrisy. What is a synonym for *hypocrisy*?